Building for the Future

"One of our top priorities is to help spur economic growth in Colorado. These efforts include supporting increased Internet access in Colorado communities and finding new ways to harness the educational power of the web. Internet access is essential to helping Colorado's economy grow and thrive."
– Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper, September 2011

Before Internet Essentials, no private company had tried to tackle all the major barriers to broadband adoption in one comprehensive program. Our work to design and implement Internet Essentials helped build momentum for other stakeholders to try similar programs. Recently, the FCC, under the leadership of Chairman Julius Genachowski, together with the National Cable & Telecommunications Association and a group of nonprofits and diverse technology companies, followed suit and adopted the Connect to Compete initiative, which closely tracks Internet Essentials in structure and intent.

Lessons Learned

In the short time since launching Internet Essentials, we have learned a great deal. Certain aspects of Internet Essentials are performing above expectations; others are not working as well as we would like. Some of these lessons were learned in our day-to-day experience, while others are the outgrowth of our survey research.

Key lessons learned to date include the following:

- **Participation is directly tied to school and community engagement.** Simply stated, in areas where we had more involvement from our community partners and in particular, strong school district support, we had noticeably higher participation levels in the program. Our research revealed that partnering with trusted members of the community, such as school districts, faith-based organizations, providers of social services, community-based organizations and local officials would be the most effective way to inform low-income families of the program. Our research also revealed that nearly half of all customers became aware of Internet Essentials from their schools. And when we observe the response rates in the largest school districts, it appears that there is a real correlation between the schools that aggressively promote the program and the number of families signing up for Internet Essentials. We will, therefore, be working to get schools even more engaged in the effort.

- **Publicity, both paid and earned media, is an important complement to an engaged school district.** We, therefore, intend to continue our paid and earned media strategies, including our PSA and Comcast Newsmaker campaigns.

- **Broadband relevance will take more time to address.** Our research reaffirms that broadband education is important and necessary for customers to fully appreciate and use the service. We also discovered that there is a wide range of digital literacy readiness, and we need to factor this into our training. It is also clear that our Online Learning Center is underutilized. We continue to work with our community partners and organizational experts in digital literacy to further understand the spectrum of needs of our targeted audience, how we can better promote awareness of the resources we are making available and how we can improve the accessibility and depth of content we offer.

- **The application process should be made as simple as possible.** Over the course of launching the program, we made several adjustments to the application process and introduced numerous tactics to ensure a smooth customer experience. We want to eliminate every possible upfront barrier for eligible families to apply for and get accepted into the program and continue to seek out new and better ways to both simplify it and get families online faster.

Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter speaks at the Internet Essentials launch event in Philadelphia, PA.
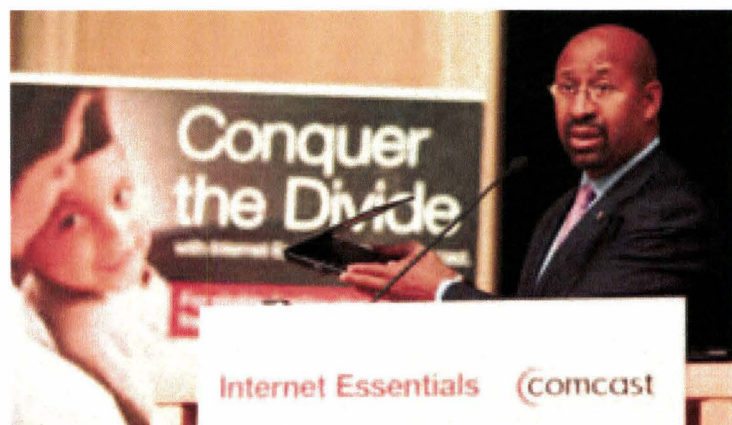
2011 Program Adjustments

As we have outlined in this report, we have drawn upon these learnings to adjust the program throughout its early implementation.

Over the course of 2011, we

- Updated our call center training and scripts to more quickly and directly initiate the enrollment process;

- Initiated a "resend and remind" program, which automatically sends replacement application kits to those who have failed to return an application within three weeks of receiving it;

- Added an option for applicants to fax back applications;

- Begun accepting prior year free school lunch letters as supporting documentation; and

- Inserted a brightly colored reminder checklist into the application kit to ensure documentation is filled out properly the first time.

FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski talks with a student at the Internet Essentials launch event in Washington, DC.